

A Rites of Passage Framework

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A rites of passage program will guide boys into mature manhood in essence saving their lives.



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*This publication is dedicated to my son Glynne Harrell.
When God allowed you to come into the world you sparked in me a desire to
be a better man.
I love you!
I'm proud of you!
Change the world...*

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Rites Inc. Presents A Rites of Passage Framework

Introduction

Why this framework is important to you

"Where there is no vision, the people perish..." Proverbs 29:18. Our young men lack vision as they transition into adulthood and as a result they perish. As caring adults we fail them. In absence of a wholesome vision of responsible male adulthood young men fill the void with their own vision of what manhood is—often leading to destructive behavior—the kind of behavior that frightens all of us. Want a better community? Then guide young men purposefully into manhood with a rites of passage program—starting with your own son.

I don't have to list countless statistics that reiterate what you already now—when our boys have a skewed vision of manhood they destroy instead of love, contribute, and build. This framework empowers every caring adult to mitigate boys' destruction by guiding them lovingly and knowingly into manhood.

If you want to be reminded of the societal consequences when we fail at guiding young men to embrace manhood, just watch the news—but instead of asking "What is this world coming to?" roll up your sleeves and start saving your community by saving boys' lives with the implementation of a rites of passage program.

As an African American boy growing up in Miami, FL I groped unsuccessfully during my transition into adulthood. In my groping I embraced images and behaviors of manhood that were destructive. I did not want that for my son. Out of that desire his rites of passage program was born.

You can use this Framework to build a program unique to your son no matter your ethnicity.

What Is a Rites Of Passage?

Rites of passages are life events that mark lines of demarcation between different life stages.

There are two ways to view rites of passage 1) everyday events and 2) ritualized events. You are familiar with the first form. Examples are: a child goes to college; a child tries out for and makes a sports team in high school; a teenager learns to drive; the transitions from elementary school to middle, then middle to high; a young child learns to potty. All of these are everyday examples of rites of passage (life events that mark lines of demarcation between different life stages).

With that definition in mind, a rites of passage is not one single life event. In fact we all will experience rites of passages until our death.

The second perspective—a ritualized event—is the focus of this publication. The rites of passage ritualized event (or rites of passage program) is not a single event but an ongoing teaching process that can last for years. The focused program helps usher the young man successfully into responsible male adulthood. The rites of passage program focuses on teaching the young man to embrace responsible male adulthood, respect for womanhood, and positive contribution to society among other things.

Those are the fundamental differences between the two angles of rites of passage. This publication offers a framework that will guide your family in creating its own rites of passage program for your son.

The Importance of a Rites of Passage Program

"Why is it that our culture does not initiate and birth its boys into a spiritually-rich vision of manhood? If boys do not, during three to five years of adolescent initiation, learn how to feel connected to life and the life process through a sense of initiated spiritual security, they will act in ways that make us afraid for our own security...[T]hey will become antisocial at worst or at least unable to commit to values of intimacy, community service, and personal boundaries."

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"Our culture has neglected to see that every boy will make the hero's journey whether we help or not. The question is what kind of hero will he become? If we are intimate teachers who devote our soulful energy to leading that hero through all the possibilities of heroism—from protection to empathy to accomplishment to prayer—the boy will not need to beat up women, join a gang, hate his parents, or destroy his community to be a hero."

"Boys become men by becoming the kinds of "heroes" we help them to be."

"Boys seek from the adult male world and its male kinship systems the love which says, "Your young gifts, visions, strengths, and vulnerabilities are acceptable and worthy." If they are not taught otherwise, boys will destroy in order to prove they are men."

Above, Michael Gurian, author of *The Wonder of Boys*, precisely lays the foundation of why a rites of passage program is important.

If you are reading this publication I suspect you have visited my blog at www.positivepassage.wordpress.com and that you want some guidance in designing your own Rites Inc. Rites of Passage Program. First, thank you for saving the life of your son (or other boy in your life); though you may not have framed it that way that is how I internalize this entire idea—saving the lives of our boys. *I call this a "framework" because you are encouraged to take the ideas that work for you, throw the rest out, replacing them with your own. Nothing is set in stone.*

Note: although written in terms of your son, please take son to mean any young man in your life you love enough to design a rites of passage program for.

This publication is a "quick start guide". It addresses the following questions:

- How did I design a Rites of Passage Program for my son?
- What were the key components of the program?
- What were the execution milestones?
- What activities were done?
- What curriculum was used?

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There are two main objectives for the “quick start guide”:

1. Give you concise information surrounding designing/executing a rites of passage program.
2. Relate the framework of a rites of passage program in a quick and easy format. This publication is not meant to be exhaustive.

After reading A Rites of Passage Framework you will have enough information to start designing your customized rites of passage program or to continue your research armed with more ideas.

Remember, the “framework” is just a guideline of ideas: mix, match, and remove ideas to make it fit your life, values, and most importantly the young man you love.

The Rites of Passage Program

A rites of passage program enables parents, educators, and mentors to implement specific activities strategically designed to help young men develop an understanding of how significant they are to their families and communities and how their families and communities significantly influence their lives. Additionally, young men will participate in activities designed to foster critical thinking skills, develop basic life skills, and strengthen their faith by experiencing the vastness of God’s creation.

Program activities include 13 **Lessons** that involve writing essays, conducting interviews, reading books and writing summaries in addition to ‘hands-on’ activities. The **Quest** is a physically challenging activity designed to help the young man experience the vastness of God’s creation while discovering new physical abilities. The **Ceremony** is a specific event that takes place at or near the end of the rites of passage program—during this celebratory gathering, members of the young man’s family and community offer words of encouragement, prayer, and appreciation. The **Ascension Dinner**, which may take place in conjunction with the Ceremony, or at a later date, formally concludes the rites of passage program. Completion of the entire program can take place in approximately 12 months. However, the rites of passage program *is a small part of manhood training for the young man and that takes years.*

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Before we explore the four key components of the Rites of Passage Program let us discuss mindset.

Mindset

Conscientious parents want the best for their sons. This must be manifested in a ***mind set*** on seeking and taking advantage of life-enriching opportunities. Here's an illustration that will help define the true meaning of mindset. Suppose you want your son to become more conscientious of the world around him and may want civic-mindedness to be a part of your son's rites of passage program. Well, when your place of worship asks for donations and volunteers to put together holiday baskets filled with food for needy families take advantage of this opportunity and get involved.

As the parent your mind must be made up to demonstrate the qualities you seek to develop in your son. This demonstration will most likely require your time, energy, and resources—sounds like parenthood, right? That's exactly the point; engaged parents already have their ***minds set*** on raising their sons by being involved and connected. Those bedrock concepts are the precursors to a formalized rites of passage program.

As parent your mind must be made up to demonstrate the qualities you seek to develop in your son.

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The Four Components

The following are the key components I identified for my son's rites of passage program. Though there are a ton of activities you can do, through my extensive research and conversations with engaged parents I identified these as the core.

- The Lessons
- The Quest
- The Ceremony
- The Ascension Dinner

Although I designed 13 lessons, you can come up with the number of lessons that suite your needs.

The Lessons

Purpose of the Rites of Passage Lessons

The rites of passage lessons afforded me the opportunity to refine the definition of manhood for my son, broaden his knowledge in the area of finances for example, and guide him to make the right choices when faced with peer pressure.

Importance of the Rites of Passage Lessons

The rites of passage lessons were important not only because they allowed me to broaden my son's knowledge but they also allowed me to more deeply embed our family's values.

I developed 13 lessons for my son's rites of passage program. I found this challenging because it was difficult to decide what topical lessons to include. There was so much I wanted to teach him. So then how would you decide what lessons to include or exclude from the rites of passage program you design for your son?

To answer that question appropriately you must know your son and deeply consider the knowledge you want to impart. This program is not a one-size-fits-all program. As the parent you must assess your son and decide, to the best of your ability, what he needs most. The lessons you decide to include in your customized rites of passage program will fit—trust yourself and relax. I learned to trust my judgment after fretting

"Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood." -Helen Keller

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over the lessons. I had to remember, the rites of passage program was just a piece of the overall teaching my son would get from me as he matriculated through adolescence. So take it easy on yourself—this does not have to be perfect—it is impossible to teach everything. Remember, this is just one step in the overall maturation process.

Lesson One:

Title: What is manhood?

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson was to discover what my son considered manhood to be.

Activity: A 300-word essay written from the young person's perspective.

Lesson Two:

Title: What will you do?

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson was to challenge the way my son would respond to peer pressure.

Activity: In this lesson my son had to answer 3 to 5 questions (in writing) built around a negative peer pressure scenario. For example one question was "what will you do if one of your friends that you deeply admire, offers you drugs?"

Lesson Three:

Title: What is womanhood?

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson was to challenge my son's thoughts surrounding womanhood and to allow him to discover how women defined womanhood.

Activity: An essay of 500-1000 words. Additionally my son had to interview five women asking them this same question.

Lesson Four:

Title: Positive mantras.

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson was to invoke creativity, introspection, and nurture the importance of thinking and speaking positively.

Activity: My son had to create three life-affirming mantras of his own.

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Lessons Five, Six, and Seven:

Title: Reading assignments.

Purpose: The purpose of the reading assignment lessons covered several things first, I took advantage of the fact that my son was an avid reader, second, it gave me the opportunity to expose him to renowned African-American authors, third it created another element we could do together.

Activity: Read Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison, Black Like Me by John Griffin, and Native Son by Richard Wright and write a book summary. (These reading assignments were given over time.)

Lesson Eight:

Title: Where do you see yourself by age 25?

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson was to have my son invoke a future positive vision of himself after self-reflection and in consideration of his likes, dislikes, hopes and dreams.

Activity: Written essay of any length and discussion.

Lesson Nine:

Title: What's happening to me?

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson was to explore, through reading and discussion, age appropriate psychosocial and psychosexual topics about sex, love, and commitment.

Activity: Read Preparing for Adolescence by Dr. James Dobson. Discuss changes in the adolescent body, how the female view of love is different from the male, and the importance of self-control. (This activity was continuous over a long period of time and was accentuated through various discussions and life events.)

Lesson Ten:

Title: Financial responsibility.

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson on finances was to expose my son to practical financial matters e.g. balancing a checkbook.

Activity: Worksheets surrounding things like paying bills, balancing a checkbook, saving, and budgeting. Additional activities surrounding this topic included trips to the grocery store, adding up all groceries, paying with a debit card, and sitting with his mom when she had to pay household bills for the month. My son also attended a financial literacy workshop as a member of the [NMBAA South Florida chapter Leaders of Tomorrow](#) youth organization.

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Lesson Eleven:

Title: What is entrepreneurship?

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson was to help develop in my son an understanding of what entrepreneurship is and plant the seed of business ownership.

Activity: As a member of the [NBMBAA South Florida chapter Leaders of Tomorrow](#) youth organization my son participated in business ownership workshops.

Lesson Twelve:

Title: The love of Christ.

Purpose: The purpose of the love of Christ lesson was to allow my son to explore his faith more deeply.

Activity: A written essay of any length. This essay was also used as his speech during the rites of passage ceremony.

Lesson Thirteen:

Title: Giving back through community service.

Purpose: The purpose of the giving back lesson was to instill the value and importance of community service.

Activity: As a member of our church family my son participated in a neighborhood clean-up, has mentored younger boys, and volunteered as a youth counselor during our congregation's summer camp.

Although these are my outlined lessons, just like all plans, things did not unfold exactly as I wished. But guess what, that's okay! Writing the lessons out completely along with the other elements of the program was a huge milestone. It made the process more concrete and served as a step forward.

The Quest

The purpose of the Quest

Michael Gurian the author of *The Wonder of Boys* says "[J]ourney through initiation includes a confrontation with what is called the "the shadow" in myths and fairy tales. This shadow character...represents that part of each of us that is shadowy, destructive; hurtful...every boy drags a shadow behind him. Every boy, during his initiation into manhood, learns to confront that shadow. When boys "act out,"...act irresponsibly—driving dangerously, caring not at all if they get a girl pregnant, mouthing off disrespectfully, and

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destroying property, committing crime— they are exercising the shadow, crying out for direction, discipline, and leadership. ...every boy must learn— by experience, education, parenting, and mentoring—how to discipline himself, how to discipline the shadow.”

A big part of the purpose of the Quest is to create the environment where a young man can face his emotions (fear and anger) and work through them in a healthy way. While also being challenged physically, learning new skills, and experiencing a deeper sense of independence and self-reliance.

Gurian continues "*[In the Shavante of Brazil] Boys are mentored on...[V]ision Quests in a dangerous and frightening wilderness so that they learn how to move through fear and find the self that perseveres.”*

The second part of the purpose of the Quest, for our family, was to incorporate our value and belief in God as Creator of all things.

The Importance of the Quest

The importance of the Quest surrounds how a young man projects pinned-up emotions onto others because he hasn't learned how to control his anger and fear. Michael Gurian puts it this way "*The essential idea in this questing is that if a boy's fear is not trained, he will not use it to further himself and his community—rather, he will, from his own position of fear, try to make others afraid.”*

Our Family's Implementation of the Quest Component

Everything I read during my research surrounding a rites of passage program mentioned in some form a quest. For me, the core of the idea was to get my son away from the family to experience deeper independence. Additionally the Quest is an opportunity to see God's handiwork up close. Lastly, to confirm physical growth and change (for example stronger muscles) the Quest should be challenging in that regard—to the extent that the young man has to reach deeper in himself to be successful in overcoming the Quest.

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For our son the Quest was a 21 day sailing trip in the British Virgin Islands. He traveled for the first time by himself out of the country. He learned to navigate the catamaran he lived on and keep it clean. He had to rotate with his shipmates in preparing meals. He cataloged marine life and explored new shores. He learned to scuba dive and in doing so faced his fears. In overcoming the fear associated with this new skill he became more confident.

The Ceremony

The Purpose of the Ceremony

The purpose of the rites of passage Ceremony is to, in a celebratory fashion, allow friends, family, and supporters to share in the acknowledgement of the demarcation line between boyhood and young adulthood. The Ceremony is accented with food, music, and words of encouragement and admonishment.

The Importance of the Ceremony

The Ceremony not only acknowledges the line of demarcation of boyhood and manhood but also publicly proclaims the same. Caring adults in unison proclaim to the young man they see him differently. The young man in like manner proclaims to those that love him he embraces the new role he fills and the responsibility that accompanies it.

Without the Ceremony the young man is confused about where he is in the maturation process toward full responsible male adulthood, not fully realizing he must begin putting away childish behavior.

Our Family's Implementation of the Ceremony Component

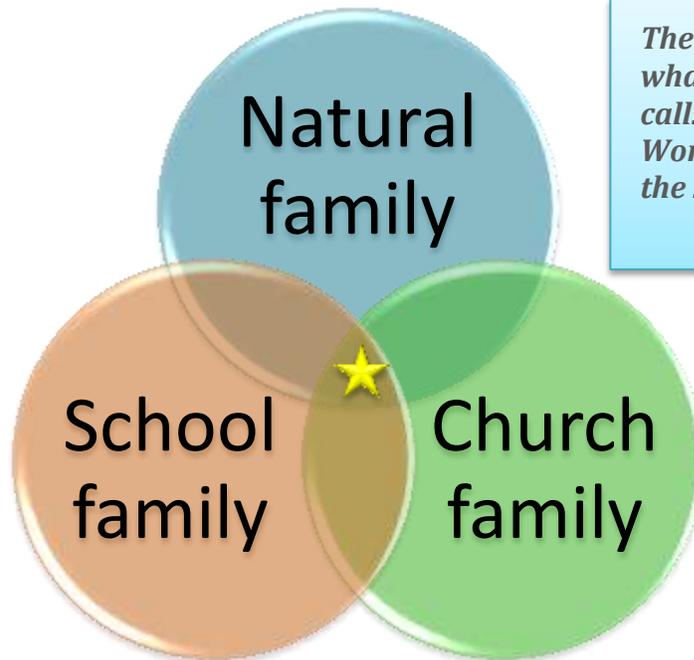
To get more details about our family's implementation of the Ceremony visit my blog at www.positivepassage.wordpress.com.

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1: Ceremony decorations



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The diagram is an example of what author Michael Gurian calls the 3 Families (in The Wonder of Boys). Your son is the star in the center.

The Ascension Dinner

The purpose of the Ascension Dinner

The purpose of the Ascension Dinner was to give my son a more intimate audience in which to concisely express key things associated with the Quest. It was designed so that he could specifically share how he changed during the Quest and what he learned about himself.

The Importance of the Ascension Dinner

The Ascension Dinner component is important because only in this smaller setting will family and intimate friends be able to ask engaging questions about the young man's experience during the Quest. It is called "the ascension" because it marks the continuation of the young man's journey upward and onward to greater achievements.

This is the end of the Rites Of Passage Program, but it is only a step in the overall transition to adulthood for the young man.

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Our Family's Implementation of the Ascension Dinner Component

Our family did not execute the Ascension Dinner as a separate Rites of Passage Program component. We combined it with the Ceremony. It is important, therefore, in your program I encourage you to execute it as a separate element.

Conclusion

That is your Rites of Passage Framework. Take time to peruse the Rites Inc. Resources section at the end of this publication for additional helpful information. Look for a full account of the Rites Inc. Rites of Passage story sometime in the future. That product will delve deeper into the genesis of my journey to custom design a rites of passage program uniquely fit for my son. I hope this "quick start guide" has helped you in some small way. Feel free to connect with me on my blog at www.positivepassage.wordpress.com. All the best to you and your family especially the boys you love!

Recap of my purpose for this publication

A Rites of Passage Framework is a "quick start guide". It was created to help families design a customized rites of passage program for their son. It addressed the following questions:

- How did I design a Rites of Passage Program for my son?
- What were the key components of the program?
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You can contact me through the blog with questions, comments, or rants at: www.positivepassage.wordpress.com

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Rites Inc. Resources Section

Quest Considerations

Outwardbound Wilderness Youth Ventures

www.outwardbound.org

Appalachian Mountains Backpacking, Rock Climbing & Whitewater Canoeing - Youth Ventures

Odyssey Expeditions (*this is the Quest we sent my son on*)
21-day catamaran sailing trip in the British Virgin Islands
www.odysseyexpeditions.com

Books

The Wonder of Boys

By Michael Gurian

Blogs

Boys' Rites of Passage

www.positivepassage.wordpress.com

Parenting Resources

Parent Further

www.parentfurther.com

Family Education

www.familyeducation.com

Programs

National Rites of Passage Institute

www.ritesofpassage.org

Rites of Passage Vision Quest

www.ritesofpassagevisionquest.org

Boys to Men

www.boystomen.org

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